

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 071 814

RC 006 703

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TITLE Chicano Educational Priorities: Mindongo, Hash, or Potpourri.
PUB DATE 28 Jul 72
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at a workshop on Southwest Ethnic Groups: Sociopolitical Environment and Education, El Paso, Texas, July 28, 1972
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.65 HC-\$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Attitudes; *Change Agents; Cultural Awareness; *Curriculum Development; Educational Innovation; *Educational Problems; *Mexican Americans

ABSTRACT

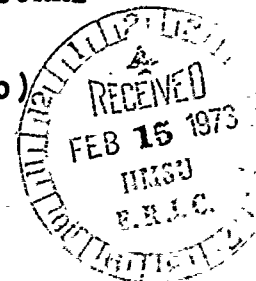
Mixed feelings about the state of the art in education and over the proposals for the education of Mexican Americans are expressed. Unfortunately, the majority of college faculty make but few changes, and it is suggested that more change and innovation come from the public schools. Expressions of revolt against the traditional curriculum have not brought about significant change. So, the major problem continues to be the perpetuation of a rigid curriculum; consequently, school people are viewed with suspicion. Further, strong disagreement exists over specifics in Mexican American culture and Spanish language elements which may serve as a basis for curriculum change. And this is blurred by the lack of clear or at least acceptable descriptions of characteristics that have application on a larger and universal scale. General guidelines are suggested for curriculum changes for the education of Mexican American groups. (Author/NQ)

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CHICANO EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES: MINDONGO, HASH, OR POTPOURRI

(A Workshop on Southwest Ethnic Groups: Sociopolitical
Environment and Education, University of Texas at El Paso)

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July 28, 1972



The title to my remarks may well be given in terms that
I recall my father using: "Mindongos acerca Temas Pedagógicas."
An approximate translation is: "Educational Hash," or if
this is too grass-rootish it is: "A Potpourri of Educational
Thinking."

Whatever the title, hopefully, it projects a deep sense
of ambivalence and perhaps dissatisfactions about frequent
discussions of educational trappings and trivia which ef-
fectively consume our time. Mine are mixed feelings about
the state of the art in education at the university in
particular, and worse yet over the pronouncements, exhortations,
and supplications as well as directives, challenges, and
ultimatums in the name of education for the good of Mexican-
American children.

Today, educators and many other writers are producing a
lot of rubbish, and the sooner we wake up to this fact the
more likely are we to move toward stated educational goals
many of which are desirable. Unfortunately, the classic
position of a great majority of college administrators and
faculty is not to rock the boat. They are the "Academic
Gyroscopes."

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ABSTRACT: "Chicano Educational Priorities: Mindongo, Hash, or Potpourri"

Mixed feelings about the state of the art in education and over the proposals for the education of Mexican-Americans are expressed. Unfortunately, the majority of college faculty make but few changes, and it is suggested that more change and innovation come from the public schools. Expressions of revolt against the traditional curriculum have not brought about significant change. So, the major problem continues to be the perpetuation of a rigid curriculum; consequently, school people are viewed with suspicion.

Further, strong disagreement exists over specifics in Mexican-American culture and Spanish language elements which may serve as a basis for curriculum change. And this is blurred by the lack of clear or at least acceptable descriptions of characteristics that have application on a larger and universal scale. Generally guidelines are suggested for curriculum changes for the education of Mexican-American groups.

University and college people tend to be followers--reluctant followers--for the pace makers in many of the public schools. If these changing schools have a burden to unload it is the one created by the traditionalists in disciplines such as history, political science, and sociology who have created layers of deadwood which must first be burned-off. Publishers of educational materials which schools buy effectively complete the job to the detriment of Mexican-Americans.¹

University people who are exceptions to my comments, unfortunately, have not been able to make major inroads into conventional university programs. Those professors most worthy of their keep are effectively blocked and channeled otherwise.

My working premise in this workshop is that the standard Anglo curriculum is based on long-established norms, value standards, and an ethos revolving around the "Puritan ethic."² It is a middle-class WASP artifact.

Currently, a revolt is raised against this status quo and it disturbs the equilibrium of those whose fortunes rise and fall with those of educational institutions. But this revolt is but a ripple and it has in no great way shaken or

¹David K. Gast, "Characteristics and Concepts of Minority Americans in Contemporary Children's Functional Literature," (Doctoral thesis, Arizona State University, 1965; Teaching Prejudice: A Content Analysis of Social Studies Textbook Authorized for use in Ontario, Curriculum Series/12, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1971.

²Nathaniel N. Wagner and Marsha J. Haug, Chicanos: Social and Psychological Perspectives, (St. Louis: The C. V. Mosby Company, 1971), p. 246.

weakened the nature of curriculum organization. Some Anglo-Americans on the fringe, many of them middle class, question the existing curriculum. This is no news to anyone.

This curriculum which reflects a traditional value structure fails rather miserably to provide an equitable education for many ethnic and cultural minorities. I am now talking about Americans of Mexican descent.

Problem number one then is the existence and perpetuation of a rigid curriculum created for an Anglo middle class and which excludes those clients who fall into low social and economic categories. This applies to any group of Americans-- White, Black, Spanish-speaking, or Native-American. The Mexican-American then faces not only some cultural and language differences in the school but also in disproportionate numbers, finds himself among the poorest socioeconomically speaking. The inadequacies in public schools and universities as instruments for change and education of Mexican-Americans are already amply documented. This fact is publicly debated, protested, and violently thrust on reluctant educators.

Educators and administrators are masters of glib lip service and political contrivances which effectively suppress promising efforts for changes that have as goals meaningful entry and participation by Mexican-Americans.

Problem number two: educators in public schools and colleges as a result of their past and present failures, are

logically considered enemies. Frequently, Mexican-Americans who are educators are likewise categorized. Is the answer new teachers or change in existing ones?

If it can be argued that good programs use cultural, psychological, environmental, and experiential immediacies of Mexican-American's life space as bases for curriculum; if it can be argued that these cultural elements are identifiable then we are further strengthened for at least substantial and pertinent reform. But are we in such a position of certainty?

My experiences and observations lead me to a third problem: strong disagreement exists over the question of Mexican-American culture and Spanish language as a basis for curriculum change. Many continue to parrot, "but our task is to make Americans of those Mexicans." Educators who tend to feel otherwise, in substantial numbers, are unwilling to rock the boat. Because administrators tend to view this problem as political rather than educational they avoid the issue whenever possible.

More recently there has been a relative increase in advocacy of Mexican-American cultural identity.³ I happen to support this view. A person who is at ease with his world

³Arthur B. Rendon, Chicano Manifesto, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971.

is one who knows and who accepts what he was, what he is and what he hopes to become.

Voices today emerging from the ethnic community speak with a self-righteous criticism, a bitter alienation toward the dominant society, and a zealous morality about the validity of their expressed views. I agree with much that is said about the inequities foisted by the dominant group upon Mexican-Americans as a group in the past as well as in the contemporary situation. I doubt, however, that anyone can speak with great assurance about cultural characteristics of Americans of Mexican descent.⁴

The fourth problem: The nature and quality of the culture attributed to Mexican-Americans is more rhetoric than fact. Whatever Mexican culture roots may be, or may have been for our fathers, they are not the same for Mexican-Americans. Though the acculturative process is relentless, the culture of the dominant society also is not identical to that of Mexican-Americans.

Mexican-Americans are frequently described as caught in culture conflict, as marginal people between two cultures, or as anomic. This distorts much of reality. Many cannot be so categorized. How do you then describe them?

I also resist the notion that on the one hand the Anglo-American is culturally well described by such traits as

⁴Y. Arturo Cabrera, Emerging Faces: The Mexican-Americans, Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company, Publishers, 1971. pp. 53-57.

effort-optimism, material well-being, conformity, control over nature, punctuality, and cleanliness--just to cite a few of the myths.⁵

Nor is there strong evidence about our recent generations of Mexican-Americans that suggests their dominant orientations to be characterized by masks of vanity, bragadoccio, or exaggerated individualism;⁶ or present time orientation, or inability to defer gratification, or fatalism, or machismo, or subordination of women, or patriarchal structure, ad nauseam.⁷

I have addressed myself to four broad problems--or speculations. What can be possible avenues of exploration if not solution?

I do not see significant change coming through spontaneous intervention of educational administrators. I do not see too much hope for meaningful alteration as a result of governmentally approved and funded programs. On the one hand the time commitment given funded programs is generally limited, and what is needed is time for planning, implementation, assessment, and retrial, and secondly, because political motivations are basically involved in granting subsidized programs. Educational merit is secondary.

⁵Corra Du Bois, "The Dominant Value Profile of American Culture," American Anthropologist, 57: 1232-1239, December, 1955

⁶Octavio Paz, El Laberinto de la Soledad, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Mexico, 1950. Pp. 25-38.

⁷Y. Arturo Cabrera, "A Study of American and Mexican-American Cultural Values," (Doctoral thesis, University of Colorado, 1963) pp. 171-175.

A multitude of educators in the public schools and universities are either contrary, consciously indifferent, or totally dormant on issues of education for Mexican-Americans. Yet, there may be hope for change. Change can generate from the actions of strong and independent professionals who simply make themselves heard. The hope lies in awakening the dormant element of the teaching profession in order to reinforce new ideas, humanistic values and programs.

The most likely avenue for accelerated change, however, is through strong community and political activism and confrontation against those who are responsible for institutional government.

Much of this leadership in battle shall have to come from activist Mexican-Americans both from grass-roots as well as professional ranks. The latter must continue to be a part of the struggle if gains are to be made and held. Power coalitions are much in order. Anglo humanists are a part of this.

University professors, Mexican-American and Anglo alike, in spite of anxieties and disequilibriums created by turmoil and confrontations, must reassert themselves to the promotion of disciplined theorizing and exploratory approaches in educational planning, cultural behavior, language learning, as well as strategies likely to create more and better handles for improved education for Mexican-Americans.

The old rhetoric, the political grandstanding, the tired platitudes heard so far must be recognized for what they are-- phases in the lives of Mexican-Americans in search of identity and participation in a dynamic society.

At this point and in abrupt digression a number of ideas will be suggested which have cultural implications for curriculum reform.

Practical implications for the school curriculum at any level seem quite clear. If cultural intimacy, group reinforcement, personal experience, and motivational values continue as credible conditions for learning then some of the following would be implemented:

The Spanish language would be used as the language of instruction for those needing it and as a springboard for learning English.

All children would participate and gain from bilingual education programs.

All teachers, Anglo and Mexican-American alike, would speak and accept Spanish as a language of instruction.

Educational materials content would include much of the appropriate historical, achievement, artistic, scientific, economic and other aspects of the total Hispanic heritage. The omission today of Mexican-Americans and stereotypes perpetuated from past school materials would be corrected.

Teachers would engage in preservice in Universities

as well as inservice education in school districts for education of Mexican-Americans.

Holidays, foods, games, songs, activities, arts, personalities and those matters important in the cultural history of Mexican-Americans would be part of the total curriculum for all children.

Teachers would distinguish between the effects of socioeconomic deprivations and cultural differences.

Vastly greater numbers of school credentialed and academic personnel of Mexican descent would be sought, recruited, and appointed to schools and universities.

This listing could continue rather indefinitely; but it suggests the direction and substance of change needed.

Though governmental and community politics are some explanation for failures in achieving what has been suggested, major obstacles to the implementation of these kind of a programs are the universities and public schools themselves.

I do not know what will be said during this workshop. But much of will be helpful I am sure. I have expressed a high skepticism about the current state of the art in education, and further, it may be that both Anglos and Mexican-Americans here may be too much a product of the system, perhaps, to challenge the processes which lead to many of our conclusions.

My real hope, however, is that all participants shall emerge from this workshop feeling cleansed and refreshed by thoughts and challenges about Mexican-Americans brought into a sharper focus.